Rock Valley College

VOICES

SPRING 06

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V6
Spring
2006

VOICES SPRING 2006

VOICES is produced each semester by students enrolled in Journalism 139 and by members of Rock Valley's Literary Arts Club.

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AN EXERPT FROM MOTHER NATURE'S SON

By John Girone

The Men of the Order had donned their white sashes, a blood red arrow emblazoned on them. Carrying torches, they came out of the woods in the darkness just after sunset and gathered each group of men and boys from their respective camps. Single file, they would follow the Men of the Order through the woods to the path that lead to the Council Ring. This path was lit by torchlight, and the torches seemed to dance in time to the drums that could now be heard from the Council Ring ahead. The fear and anticipation filled the woods around the thousands of boys and men as they silently followed the Men of the Order to the Council Ring.

THAT CANDIDATE WAS DRAGGED BY HIS ARMS BY TWO OF THE MEN OF THE ORDER TO THE FRONT OF THE CLEARING AND PUSHED TO HIS KNEES IN FRONT OF THE CHIEF, HIS BACK TO THE CROWD.

The Council Ring was a mystical place. The path that led to it was long and twisted downhill through the towering pines and ancient oaks of the woods around us. This path eventually emptied into a small clearing, surrounded on two sides by towering limestone bluffs. The floor of the clearing was also limestone, worn smooth by the elements and the thousands of feet that had stood upon it. At the far end, a thin line of brush hid a cliff over which was a sheer drop to a river below. Shaped like a funnel that emptied over that cliff, the clearing was terraced, and the boys and men who were brought here would line the various levels, forming a half circle that faced the cliff. In the center, a bonfire burned brightly, and the heat from the flames could be felt from a hundred feet away. Once all were assembled, the beating of drums, which came out of the dark from atop the towering bluffs on either side, would cease. The silence caused by this was deafening.

The Order Chief would walk out of the woods behind the group and stand in the center, so close to the fire that I remember wondering how he wasn't burned. His shadow would tower over the crowd of silent men and boys and would dance on the bluffs on either side of us. No one was allowed to speak or look behind them, and all stood as still as the trees around the clearing. Then the selection ceremony began. The Men of the Order walked up and down the rows of the crowd. Without warning, they would push a chosen candidate forward from behind. That candidate was dragged by his arms by two of the Men of the Order to the front of the clearing and pushed to his knees in front of the Chief, his back to the crowd. Twelve were always chosen this way.

I recall my fear the moment that I felt the force of their push and I almost fell to the ground but was caught by the two men who grabbed my arms and dragged me to the front. I was barely able to keep my feet under me, as I was younger than the men, and much shorter than they were. Thrown to the ground in the front of the clearing, I was too afraid to look anywhere other than the limestone ground in front of me. I didn't see them leave, but I know that once the last candidate was selected, the rest of the crowd was silently led from the Council Ring. I know that they didn't look back at us as we kneeled before the Chief and his fire. I know that

they followed the torch-lit path back to their camps.

Once we were alone, the first words to be heard in hours came from the Chief. He explained that we were now to begin our test. The first and most important rule was that for the next five days, none of the candidates would be allowed to speak a word to anyone, especially each other. The candidates, myself included, were led into the forest behind the Council Ring. We left the main path and followed a deer trail through the dark woods. Around us, the sounds of the nighttime in the forest were clear and loud. Our feet snapped twigs and branches beneath us, and we quickly became disoriented although our guide knew precisely where we were. After ten minutes or so, the first candidate was left against a large oak tree. Our guide from the Order left him these words, "This is your home tonight. Enjoy your home, make it your own. Stay here until we come for you. If you are gone from this spot at dawn, we will know that you have chosen to leave the Order". Each of us was given a "home", separated by an unknown amount of distance and a vast darkness.

As I sat against my home, a skinny pine, I sat and listened to the sounds around me. In all the thousands of hours that I had spent in the outdoors, I had never experienced anything like this. Where there had always been a fire, crackling and warm, there was only the darkness of the woods and the cold. Where there had always been another person to carry on conversation with, there were only the sounds of the owls and other animals busy in the woods that night. With no sleeping bag, no tent, and no flashlight, I was very intimidated by the situation. The canopy of the forest was too thick to see but a few stars, and the moon was only a fleeting light that peaked through the trees. It seemed as though the animals in the forest were making more than their usual racket, sounding a chorus of howls and screeches of all sorts into the night. The sound of pinecones dropping to the ground in the darkness was constant and reminded me of a slow, steady rain. I sheltered no hope of falling asleep that night.

Then a remarkable thing occurred. After an unknown amount of time had passed – the Men of the Order had taken our watches – I began to feel calm and warm. I felt safe and secure. Suddenly, the ground wasn't hard and cold; my body had warmed the spot on which I sat. The sounds of the animals didn't seem so loud or alien, and I began to picture in my mind the animals that made them as clearly as if I saw those same animals in a photograph. The darkness faded as my eyes adjusted, and I was able to see rather clearly by the light of the stars and moon all that was around me. I became very comfortable, and a deep sleep soon came over me.

In the morning, we were gathered by the Men. None of the candidates had left their "homes". We were given dry cereal for breakfast and began a day of laboring in the woods around us. Silently, we twelve cut new hiking trails in parts of the forest we had never before seen. Each night, after sunset and in the dark, we were returned to our "homes"; each day, we resumed our labors.

After five days, at a private ceremony we were accepted into the Order. The twelve men and boys with whom I shared this experience with became my brothers and still are today. I am still able to find my "home" in those woods.

THE GUILT REMAINS

By Travis Legge

The room was silent except for the slight creaking of old wooden floorboards and the faint chattering of teeth. It was not a particularly cold day for September, but Aaron shivered in the corner of the attic. Crouching in the corner, lost in misery, he held himself as he rocked slowly back and forth. Silent tears ran freely from his eyes.

The room itself was dark except for the muted beam of afternoon sunlight that fell through the greasy window. Dust motes danced in the dull illumination. The attic had not been disturbed in years, and Aaron's entrance had upset the tranquility of the accumulated filth. Now, several minutes after Aaron's passing, the slow moving particles still hung in the light. They served Aaron as yet another reminder that every action had consequences.

THE ODOR WAS JUST ANOTHER REMINDER OF THE HORRORS OF YEARS PAST.

From the corner Aaron had chosen to wallow in, he could see the cracked wooden banister. The years had worn and splintered the edges, corrupting the handrail's original purpose as a safety measure, and assuring injury and pain to any who utilized it. Aaron felt the tingling of a kinship with the object. He too had known such corruption.

Beyond the decrepit railing was a wooden stairway. Narrow and steep, the steps would have been challenging even if the railing had been safe to use. Instead, Aaron had been forced to climb the stairs on hands and knees. Fortunately this allowed him to test the strength of each step before placing the bulk of his weight on it. No less than three of the stairs had rotted through, adding to the inherent hazard of the place. It was as if the passage of time and the elements of natural decay had conspired to bar his entry. Perhaps it was the universe's final attempt to dissuade him from facing the demons of the past. Perhaps it was just a means of keeping him here now that he had arrived.

Through his tears, Aaron could smell old newspaper. There had still been some on the floor from his last visit so many years ago. The odor was just another reminder of the horrors of years past. How many times had he lured a victim here? How many people had suffered in this very spot? The fact that he had lost track only drove him further into self-loathing.

In his youth, Aaron had used this attic as a playground of abuse and torment. He would coax neighborhood children into the attic with promises of fun games and the coolest of toys. Once safely within his sanctum of suffering, Aaron would prey upon his unsuspecting playmates with both violence and perversion. Like any gradual descent into damnation, Aaron's exploits had grown from seemingly innocuous beginnings.

During the summer of his eleventh year, he played kissing games with Betsy Brooks in the seclusion of the wooden retreat. His curiosity and exploration during their afternoon constitutionals grew at an incredible rate. Perhaps he had been an early bloomer. Perhaps his body was dealing with urges that his mind was ill-suited to process. Eventually his desires advanced beyond the point that Betsy had been comfortable with. One August afternoon, alone in the attic, Betsy pushed young Aaron away.

Though the passage of time had eroded the old man's memory, he could recall those events with painful clarity. Stunned by Aaron's advances, Betsy had pushed the boy off of her and backed away, frightened. His wandering hands had traveled beyond the safe arenas of childhood curiosity, and Betsy had become alarmed. He could still hear her weeping and smell her sweat as he remembered inching closer to her, telling her not to be scared. For some reason that Aaron never quite grasped, her fear only amplified his curiosity and fed his nascent arousal.

Aaron reached out to Betsy in an attempt to pull her closer. Motivated by terror, she clawed at his approaching hand, drawing blood with fingernails too young to have known the décor of nail polish. The first red color upon the young woman's nails was Aaron's blood. The pain he felt was another stimulus mixed into the already churning

cauldron of confusing emotions. Before he even realized what had happened, Aaron had found himself back on top of Betsy, forcing her to submit to his desires.

That had been the last afternoon that Betsy came to the attic. She never told anyone about the attack. Perhaps she was afraid of getting into trouble, or she was ashamed of the situation to the point that suffering in silence seemed preferable to seeking retribution. Whatever her motivations, Betsy never spoke a word to another living soul about Aaron's behavior. Wisely, she refused to return to the attic, but as she remained silent, it was not long before Aaron simply moved on to his next victim.

For four years this cycle continued. Aaron would bring children from the neighborhood to his attic and experiment sexually with them. Eventually his desires shifted further toward the macabre, as he began to revel in the pain he caused. In time, Aaron sought to bring physical pain to his victims above his sexual exploits. He began to cut and bruise the children who came to the attic. Even in his youth, Aaron was smart enough to exercise caution. When he would torture the children, he was always sure to leave wounds that were either well covered by clothing or easily dismissed as accidents.

It had been years since Aaron had hurt anyone. The summer of his grandmother's death had marked the end of his heinous activities. Perhaps the lack of access to his heinous haven deterred further dark pursuits. Perhaps the loss of a loved one shifted his perspective, adding new value to the feelings of others. Regardless of his motivations, Aaron was able to turn away from his unsavory exploits, embracing normalcy with the same fervor that he had exhibited in exploring decadence.

Over the intervening years, Aaron kept telling himself that his ability to stop, his ability to restrain his base urges, somehow excused the torture he had inflicted on the neighborhood children. He looked himself in the mirror, telling himself that he had only been a child as well. He was a mere fifteen years old the last summer that he had visited. He told himself that it was okay because he hadn't known better. He had fooled himself into accepting what he had done.

After decades of self-deception, Aaron came back to the attic of his grandparents' home to face down his demons. The house had sat unoccupied for some thirty years. As he was now an older man with children of his own, and a grandchild on the way, he felt that he could return to the empty house to somehow come to terms with the darkness of his childhood. He had entered the attic in the vain hopes that he could truly lay the horrid memories of his monstrous activities to rest. For years he had seduced himself into believing that he had overcome his sickness. Now, he sought to make certain that he had truly accounted for his wrongdoings.

Upon entering the attic and enduring the assault of sense memory, Aaron's delusions of self-acceptance crumbled. The odors of the room, preserved by simple neglect, called to long repressed memories. The old man plunged headlong into a barrage of past sins that had been dismissed for far too long. Allowing guilt to boil to the surface for the first time, Aaron dwelled in the revulsion he felt at his own past. Reliving every inflicted whimper of pain, delving into the memory of every spilt drop of blood, Aaron hoped to stare at the evil within, accept it as a past enemy, and move beyond into the twilight years of his life with a clear conscience.

Contrary to his hopes, immersion in the harsh reality of his long ignored guilt did not serve to clean his weary soul. He wallowed in the filth and ichor that dwelt in the darkness of his own past, slowly being dragged into inescapable remorse. He struggled for a time, attempting to come to terms with the naked truth about his actions. The struggle was ultimately futile, and eventually his hope for forgiveness was replaced by morose acceptance. Unable to repent or atone for the sins of yesteryear, the old man simply faded into insanity. His mind and reason fled, leaving only guilt and pain in their wake.

THE CONCERT

By Travis Legge

It had been years since Travis Wilson had been back to New Lisbon. In the early sixties he had moved down to Chicago in pursuit of a lifelong dream in the publishing industry. There were occasional summer trips and holidays home, of course. There had even been a family reunion in Tomah back in seventy-nine, shortly before his dad had passed away. His last trip here had been in eighty-one, to bury his mother.

AS A LIFELONG AUTHOR, HE HAD HOPED THAT HIS PERSONAL REMEMBERANCES COULD HAVE BEEN A BIT MORE ORIGINAL.

Now, years later, Travis had come home. He had been diagnosed with cancer the week before. Decades of fifteen Marlboros a day, thirty if there was a pending deadline, had finally caught up with him. The doctor made no attempt to foster false hope. The cancer was terminal. All that was left for Travis was to put his final affairs in order, then check into a hospital and be kept "comfortable".

Travis wasn't entirely sure why he had gotten in the car that morning. He didn't even realize that he was heading back home until he passed the Lake Delton exit on I-90. Now he found himself walking down Main Street, having abandoned his car a few blocks back in front of his childhood home. As he walked toward the park, the chilly October breeze blew his hair wild and rattled the orange leaves above. The sound was like his breathing, the dry rattle of slow death.

Once Travis arrived at the park, he lumbered to the old wooden bench near the sidewalk. He dropped heavily onto the old wooden bench, exhausted from the four block walk. After catching his raspy breath, the old man looked out over the park, noting how little his hometown had changed.

Looking at the old white gazebo in the center of the park, Travis's mind reached back to a happier time, the Oktoberfest concert of 1945. He was eight years old at the time. He chuckled at the horribly cliché realization that life truly had been simpler then. As a lifelong author, he had hoped that his personal remembrances could have been a bit more original. Still, as he stared at the gazebo with its peeling paint and cracked woodwork, he couldn't help but reminisce.

The soldiers were just starting to get home from World War II in the autumn of 1945. The Oktoberfest concert, held in the town's only park, was always a joyous event. The triumphant return of local soldiers only served to accentuate the happiness that permeated the small town.

A band had set up in the brand new white gazebo in the center of the park. They played patriotic big band music as the town's entire population of three hundred and seven began to filter into the park. The sweet smell of hot apple pie wafted on the breeze, carried from the Ladies Auxiliary table on the far end of the park. Johnny Christian, just back from the European front, and his sweetheart Molly MacDonald walked down the sidewalk holding hands. The Mayor walked throughout the park, shaking hands with every soldier he could find. Travis had noticed all these things, as he had even in childhood, been acutely aware of his surroundings. Still, he was an eight year old boy, and had better things to concern himself with, like torturing Suzie Jones.

Suzie was a girl from his class. She reminded him of Shirley Temple with her curly red hair and freckled

skin. She was every bit a little lady, constantly dressed finely and proper in manner. Nothing gave young Travis quite so much a charge as tormenting little Suzie.

Travis had known that Suzie was going to be at the concert. The whole town was there, after all. Armed with this knowledge he had prepared in advance. Earlier in the day he had found a toad near the Lemonwier River, which he now carried in his pocket. He intended to toss the toad at Suzie at the first solid opportunity.

As Travis walked into the park, he was able to snake away from the cast iron grip of his mother and dart freely to the area of the square where the children played. He searched the corner of the park, giggling and pulling the wart covered amphibian from his pocket. To his dismay, Suzie was nowhere to be found.

His heart sank as he was unable to locate her. He had spent the whole day dreaming of the look on her face, and to be robbed of it now was unthinkable. He ran through the crowd, weaving in and out of reunited families, proud parents, and patriotic townsfolk. After an exhaustive search, he located Suzie sitting under the oak tree at the far end of the park, her back to the concert. Gleefully, he approached.

As Travis neared the tree, he was caught off guard by the sound of sobbing. This was not the sound of a little girl crying because she had been teased, or gotten her leggings dirty. These were sobs of actual sadness. Travis wasn't certain if he had ever heard the noise before, but he certainly recognized it. Placing the toad back into his pocket, the young boy rounded the tree. Suzie looked up at Travis, wiping tears from her eyes as he stepped into view.

"What's wrong," Travis asked, kneeling next to the tearful young lady.

"Everyone else's daddy came home," Suzie replied, trying to contain her tears. "My daddy got shot in France. He's not coming home."

Travis couldn't really understand what had happened. He was just beginning to understand the concept of death, and had never lost anyone close to him. Still, he could feel her pain, and desperately wanted to help. Reaching into his pocket he pulled out the toad.

"I got this for you," he said, slowly holding the toad out for Suzie to inspect. She looked down at it and giggled.

"You was gonna toss this toad on me weren't ya," she asked, laughing through her now diminishing tears. Travis hung his head shamefully in response.

"Yeah."

"But you saw I was cryin' and you didn't?"

"Yeah."

Suzie smiled and kissed Travis on the cheek. Then she got up and ran away, heading deeper into the park. Travis sat there at the base of the oak tree dumbfounded. He was utterly clueless as to what possessed Suzie to put her lips to his cheek. Unfortunately, by the time he figured it out three years later, Suzie had moved to Madison, and he had missed his opportunity.

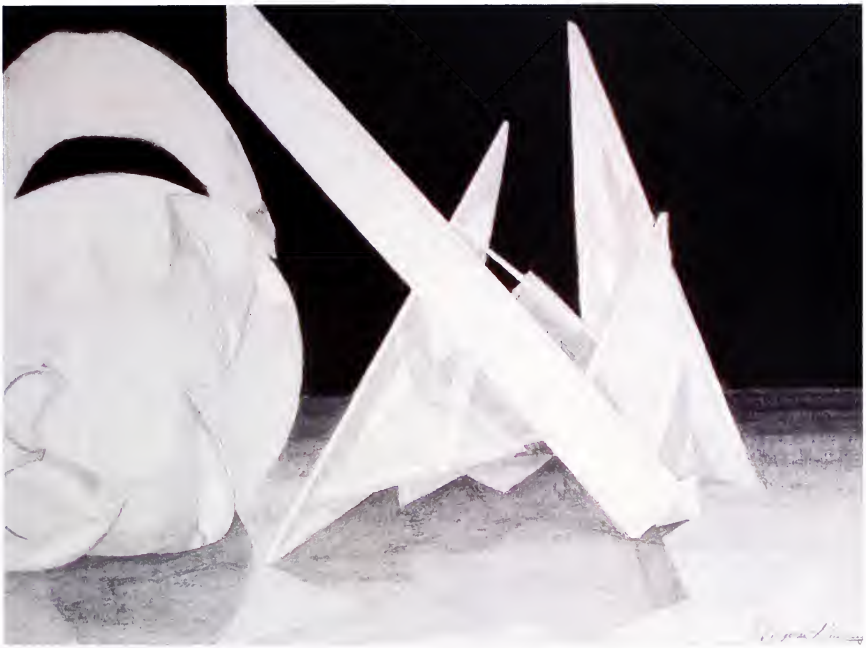
Sitting on the park bench, the old man coughed, snapping him out of his memory. He wasn't sure why he had come here, or what had sparked that particular memory above the hundreds of other memories he had of the park. As he coughed again, blood came up. The old man smiled, realizing that he didn't care why that particular memory had surfaced, he was simply glad that it had.

JAZZ SINGER

By Jessica Farr

SCULPTURES IN THE DARKNESS

By Virginia Grawey



UNTITLED

By Erin Kirkpatrick

FATHER

By Jeung Yong Park

BROKEN DREAMS

By Tonya Severing

FIRE BALL

By Darrick Wessel

TRAVEL AROUND THE WORLD

By Hsin Ying Chi

Award Winner

VESSEL²

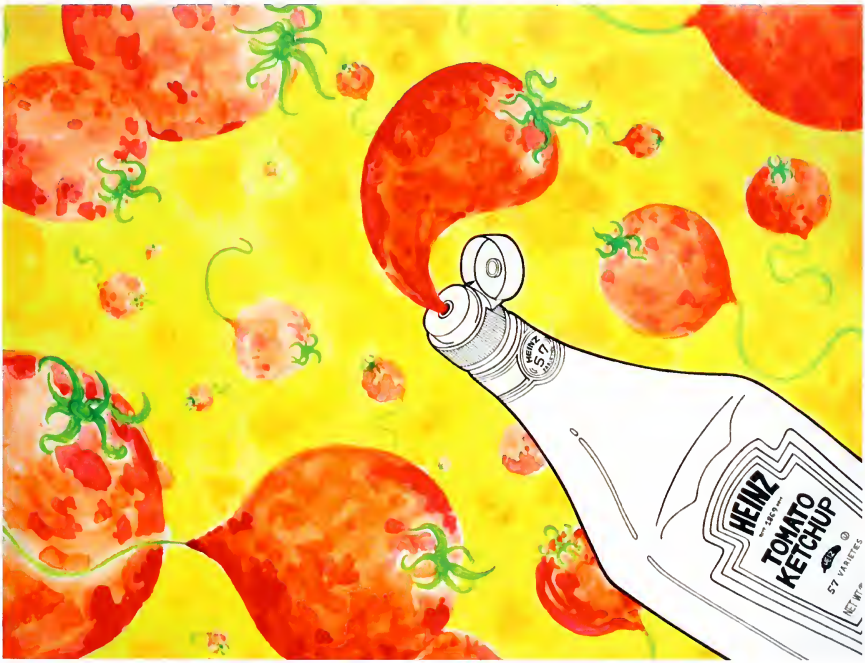
By Carole Rittenhouse

SUSPICION

By Eri Slocum

FLYING TOMATOES

By Eri Slocum



A KNIGHT'S DREAM

By Eric Meli

UNTITLED

By Erin Kirkpatrick

ASIAN BATH HOUSE WITH UNUSUAL SCENERY

By Virginia Grawey

SHE ONCE

By Hannah Kasper

Calm and serene, she stared off into sea,
Contemplating things about what she believes.

But clouded skies leave little room for light
Still she breathes in slowly, counting the waves

One... Two... Three...

Soon mile upon mile, she glides along
Walking on water and carrying along

Oh! How life can seem as simple as dreaming
a song.

I pray that she'll come home before she
becomes just a faint memory or a gleam of
light on the shore that she once sat resting on.

SOIRÉE DE NUIT

By Jordan Lindvall

Like a love affair- adulterous in nature- I'm cheating on you with your soul
My heart's been penetrated by words that resonated- deeply impregnating
You see me as you've always seen me but today I see myself as someone new

Mother me, mother me

The dirt is washed away only to expose a muddy hole
I couldn't have left well enough alone. His touch no longer touches me
I have tasted the forbidden fruit and chosen to make a pie
I have tasted the forbidden fruit now I'll go make a pie

Laying in the sodden yard- speak of life till morning
Making stories of the stars- connect the dots of destiny
The pearls around your neck in my mouth
My hand wandering, eyes wandering, mind wandering.
Never felt so alone. Never felt so unbelievable.

Mother me, mother me.

Our language, foreign to a passerby, Romanticized, it comes alive
Can't bear the sound of when you're gone. Wine at dawn. All alone.
Feelings I've never felt before- naked- frightened

Mother me, mother me.

Days till spring- the grass smells green.
But no companion in my bed. Still no comfort in my head.
Cats on fences- city gates cage us in- See the fire, See the flame.
Caution lingers near the door, I recall you spoke this once before.
You held my hair and I held my breath, but you were gone before the morning came.

THE DIARIES OF ANTIRHYTHM & SAVIOR

By Matthew Mickelson

High treason of the heart, mind, body, soul
Verses capture all that is feared lost
Denied your presence in all its glory
That with which I am captivated

The bright night air is cool only with your touch
A reminder of what could be, maybe in some other forgiving dream
But not allowed, your rationed eyes fail to catch my glance
Could it be that fear may drive to dreams your everlasting gaze?

These freeflow thoughts may die and fade when solitude is lost
Broken now, forever in another world.

I've had moments, truly sad
As those who've lost the love they had
Whose souls it seems could not repent
For glory days so careless spent

It's true that I've been there before
Like Raven's prey for Evermore
But just when things could turn for worse
I call a lonesome memoir verse

It came to me when rest could not
A credence, comfort, ripened clot
And into memory seemed to burn
That for which all tears will yearn

"A broken heart can make you whole"
Let fall these words on heart and soul
As buried fast and strong within
I find what brings me back again

NIGHTMARE REALIZED

By Beverly Snider

I woke up to find
a dream still trapped inside
was overthrowing me,
a nightmare of uncertainty

Isn't this where I've been?
I've seen this all before.
Lost in an industrial forest,
I don't know my place anymore.

Abandoned factories and warehouses
mark the tombstones of industry,
while I'm still looking for my place
and this nightmare is giving way to familiarity.

This can't be the beginning
of the rest of my life I'll be
a working class stiff
was never favorable to me

all I have is this pen,
a few words, a piece of paper
and a tumultuous storm of thoughts,
but none that you would pay for.

Now I, like you, have realized
I'm sentenced to this eternity,
and once you remove all the lies
does anyone like this eternal mediocrity?

THE BATTLE FOR SOMEDAY

By Matthew Mickelson

Award Winner

Difference is vastness put into perspective
Dignity shadows the depth of our souls
Righteousness beckons the weak and the selfish
To drive those who suffer beyond their control

Forever they fight for the good of existence
Embattlements shake with explosions of grace
Someday is coming through madness and chaos
Uncovering unity's reckless disgrace

To live and to die for a Someday that's promised
Is ignorance sheathed as a Cardinal sword
Disguises that break you from willful temptation
With blatant misgivings your only reward

Beyond where our fears lie, a new hope arises
Cascading through blackness in Legions of Light
Protecting the interests of those who stand waiting
For something to lead them from reckoning's flight

Down falls the edge of that glimmering scimitar
Vanquishing rivals of destiny's choice
Ravaging enemies' Someday and Sanctity
Taking from us no more, Freedom in voice

LOVE MALFUNCTION! MALFUNCTION! DELETE & I LOST MYSELF IN ORDER TO FIND YOU

By Tom Smith

WE BECAME SILHOUETTES DANCING IN THE MOONLIGHT

By Tom Smith

WE JUST WATCHED THE WORLD END SHOT AFTER SHOT

By Tom Smith

Award Winner

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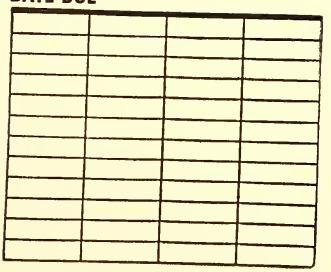
DATE DUE



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